

Searching for unity in a sea of exclamation points

OTHER VIEWS

Rich Manieri



An email laced with exclamation points is never a good sign. At least not if you're me.

In my world, exclamation points usually follow words such as "idiot!" or "communist!" I take issue with the latter though the former is certainly up for discussion.

Moreover, when the salutation itself is followed by an exclamation point, as it was in a recent email, I know it's trouble. "Mr. Manieri!"

Inside voice. I'm right here.

This particular writer went on to make several assumptions about my intellect, or lack of. He ended with a call to action. "Defend your character!"

For context, the writer was responding to a column I wrote in which I blamed President Trump for lighting the fuse that led to the Capitol riots. He went on to ask how I could do such a thing when it was clear that members

of Antifa and Black Lives Matter were bused in and were, in fact, responsible for the insurrection — a claim without any basis in fact.

My response featured a conspicuous absence of exclamation points as I encouraged the writer to keep an eye on his blood pressure.

I resisted quoting from Proverbs 15: "Those who are hot-tempered stir up strife, but those who are slow to anger calm contention."

If you watch much television, or any television, or if you engage in social media, it's pretty clear that we tend to punctuate our discourse with exclamation points. Perhaps Jerry Springer was actually a visionary. He understood the marketability of impoliteness and boorish behavior long before it went mainstream. (By the way, I promise never to use the name "Springer" and the word "visionary" in the same sentence again.)

Civility has fallen out of fashion. Some say it's overrated. How do I know this? I refer you to a December 2019 piece in the *Atlantic* titled, "Civility is Overrated."

An NPR article in 2019 quotes Lynn Itagaki, an associate professor at the University of Missouri, who said, "Civility has been about making sure that the status quo, the hierarchy of the status quo at the moment, which means racial inequality, gender inequality,

class inequality, stays permanent."

By this redefinition of civility, it would be permissible and even encouraged to meet any injustice, perceived or actual, with an uncivil response. That's fine if you happen to agree on the injustice. For example, if your candidate loses a presidential election and you believe the election was rigged, storming the Capitol might be an appropriately uncivil response.

Thus, if you disagree with someone and you're convinced you're on the right side, what's the point of a civil response? After all, you're right and he's wrong.

Many believe our national discourse fell apart the moment Donald Trump darkened the doorway of the Oval Office. Surely, the former president, with his unhelpful rhetoric, name-calling and incessant tweeting contributed to the problem. But he wasn't alone.

Our elected representatives in Washington — Republicans and Democrats — have been content to play their respective parts in the Monty Python "Argument Clinic" sketch.

"Is this the right room for an argument?"

"I told you once."

"No you haven't."

"Yes I have."

"When?"

"Just now."

"No you didn't."

"Yes I did."

The main difference, of course, between the sketch and reality is there's nothing even mildly amusing about the real thing.

For what it's worth, President Biden struck mostly the right tone in his inauguration speech.

"I pledge this to you — I will be a president for all Americans, and I promise you, I will fight as hard for those who did not support me as for those who did," Biden said. He then signed 15 executive orders undoing various Trump policies.

Unity is a fine message but no amount of rhetorical gymnastics will bring people together unless we're willing to understand and listen to those with whom we disagree. That means acknowledging that not all of the 75 million Americans who voted for Donald Trump are racists and that not everyone who voted for Joe Biden is pushing a Marxist agenda.

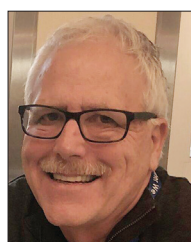
From the president on down, unless we're truly committed to making unity a reality, it won't happen, no matter how many exclamation points we use.

Rich Manieri is a Philadelphia-born journalist and author. He is currently a professor of journalism at Asbury University in Kentucky. You can reach him at manieri2@gmail.com.

Six helpful hints for spelling, reading

OTHER VIEWS

Scott Smith



With the development of vaccines for the coronavirus and distribution underway, there may be an end to distance learning just around the corner.

This said, there are still many children struggling with their reading and parents assisting their children with schooling. Learning to read is not the same for everyone.

Reading text is a "human"-created skill and not a natural skill for our brains to process. Therefore, depending on acquisition of a long spectrum of skills, some children have no problems learning to read while others struggle. To add to the confusion, English is a blend of several different languages and rules, making it even harder to understand.

There are those few people in our country who spend their time studying our language and all the rules that apply, yet most of us do not aspire to be linguists. Noah Webster, back in the 1800s, brought us a complete rule book of most of the words and rules behind their spellings. There was a time when teachers were expected to know all those rules prior to starting to teach.

Over the years we have relied on textbook publishers to provide those rules embedded in their curriculum. Many of us do not always pick up on the rules or remember them because the curriculum moves on quickly. When challenged why a word is spelled a certain way we dismiss it and say something like "the English language just has some odd spellings." In most cases, there is a reason behind that spelling, whether it be from the root of the word or the language the word was adopted from.

Having kids read to adults is always beneficial — well, most of the time. What do we find ourselves saying to a child when they come to a word they do not recognize? The most popular response is "sound the

word out." The only problem is that the only English words that can easily be sounded out are one-syllable, short vowel words. In the English language, you have to be able to identify the vowel sounds in words, many of which contain multiple letters, and then you are able to blend the word and hopefully get the sounds close enough that you are able to recognize the word from your auditory vocabulary or lexicon.

No worries — here is some help. This will be enough to get you by without having to become a linguist. There are six basic syllable rules that most English words follow, or at least follow closely enough that you can get an approximation, and then recognize the word. The same six rules also help with spelling.

Here they are — open syllable (go, me), closed syllable (cat, fin), vowel team, "r"-controlled (first, far, or), vowel/consonant/silent "e" (same, case) and consonant "-le" (little, able). Common blends, digraphs and diphthongs also can cause confusion. Blends are connected letters where you can hear all the letter sounds. Digraphs are a cluster of consonants that create a new sound, and diph-

thongs are a cluster of letters with at least one vowel. These are the most commonly found word parts in elementary texts. The letter "y" is sometimes considered a vowel but there is a reason. English words don't end in the letter "i" so they use "y" (my, sky, by).

A great activity for students to do is sort single-syllable words into each of the above groups. This allows them to work with words along with looking for vowel sounds. This activity only focuses on vowel sounds. The objective is to identify the vowel sound in each word or syllable and then blend the sounds together to get an approximation close enough that they can recognize the word or are able to spell the word closely enough to be able to recognize it.

Happy word discovery.

Scott Smith is a Umatilla County educator with 40-plus years of experience. He taught at McNary Heights Elementary School and then for Eastern Oregon University in their teacher education program at Blue Mountain Community College. He serves on the Decoding Dyslexia-OR board as their parent/teacher liaison.

Conservative has a personal mission

WRITERS ON THE RANGE

Ron Keine



I am a lifelong conservative Republican whose faith in the criminal justice system was shattered by my near-death experience with it. I came within nine days of being sent to the gas chamber for a crime I did not commit.

You could say I'm living proof of why people should not trust their government with the death penalty.

My nightmare started in 1974 when three friends and I were falsely accused of sexually mutilating and killing a student at the University of New Mexico. We were all sentenced to death in 1974.

The state had no proof — no weapon, no forensic evidence — just poorly run lie-detector tests on all four of us and an alleged witness. Even when that witness later recanted, the judge refused to grant us a new trial.

It was only after the real killer confessed that we were exonerated, and that happened in the nick of time. My execution had been scheduled, and the assistant warden had asked what I wanted for my last meal.

How could this happen?

This was an abuse of government power, and it happens more often than you might think. In our case, the main witness had been coerced to lie at the trial. Also, the murder weapon — nowhere to be seen during the trial — was later found inside the local sheriff's safe. It had been hidden from the defense and traced to a law enforcement officer who ended up confessing.

Yet our story is not unique. We are among 173 people nationwide to be freed from death sentences because of wrongful conviction.

Although the Trump administration resumed federal executions, there has been a trend of conservative Republicans at the state level rethinking the death penalty. They do so because they believe in limited government, fiscal responsibility and the value of human life.

As Republican State Sen. Owen Hill, of Denver, put it, "It is against the natural order for one created in the image of God to willfully take the life of another created in the image of God."

There are also powerful financial argu-

ments. The death penalty costs far more money than its alternatives such as life without parole, according to numerous studies in many states over a lot of years. In fact, death penalty trials, and there are always two — one to determine guilt or innocence and one to decide a sentence — have caused some municipalities to almost go bankrupt, while others have been forced to pass tax increases.

The death penalty is just another wasteful, big-government program. The 25 states that still have the death penalty — eight of them in the West — are wasting resources that could be used to make communities safer by solving cold cases or providing more tools to law enforcement.

Take Wyoming as one example. Since the state passed its death penalty law in 1977, Wyoming has carried out one execution, and today it does not have a single death row inmate. However, the state continues to spend at least \$750,000 each year on a capital defense fund to train attorneys to handle death penalty cases that rarely ever come to them. It is no wonder that the overwhelmingly Republican Wyoming Legislature came just a few votes shy of repealing the death penalty in 2019, and hopes are high they will finish the job this year.

New Mexico, where I was sentenced to death, repealed the sentence in 2009, and last year, Colorado ended capital punishment, thanks to three GOP state senators who made the crucial difference. In fact, no state west of Texas has held an execution in more than 10 years, and 2020 was another record low for new death sentences with only six total in all Western states. That's down from a high of 72 death sentences in the West in 1982.

Another encouraging sign of change has just arrived with the filing of a death penalty repeal bill in the U.S. Congress, albeit a Democratic proposal with no GOP sponsors — yet.

As someone who barely survived an encounter with the criminal justice system, I call upon all who share my values to get rid of the death penalty once and for all.

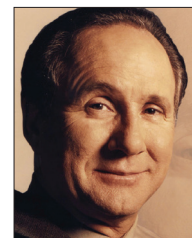
And that last meal? It was going to be macaroni and cheese, just like my mother used to make. After I was released from death row I sometimes ate mac and cheese three times a day.

Ron Keine is a contributor to Writers on the Range, writersontherange.org, a nonprofit dedicated to spurring lively conversation about the West. He is a member of the board of directors of Witness to Innocence, a small nonprofit working to end the death penalty.

With President Joe, it's divided we stand

OTHER VIEWS

Michael Reagan



Everyone agreed the inauguration ceremony was nice.

Lady Gaga was Lady Gaga. Garth Brooks was Garth Brooks.

Everyone also agreed President Joe Biden's speech was nice.

Nothing plagiarized. Nothing too fancy. Nothing that presidential historians will be quoting a month from now.

Biden's call for national unity and political healing was widely praised by Democrats, the mainstream Democrat media and even some easily impressed Republicans.

But what did our new unifier-in-chief do as soon as he got control of the presidential pen?

Keeping his campaign promises, the born-again progressive kicked off his plan to reverse President Trump's "America First" direction and turn back the country to Obama-style open-borders and an economic policy that benefits Communist China and globalists.

Biden signed 17 executive orders Wednesday and another 10 on Thursday. If they're not reversed by Congress or the courts, they are sure to hurt America and its people.

They will kill thousands of energy jobs in the Heartland, reopen our borders to waves of illegal immigrants and again subject us to the rules of the incompetent and corrupt World Health Organization and harmful international agreements like the Paris Climate Accord.

By his edicts on Wednesday, Biden immediately showed that when it comes to fostering national unity and building America back better, he's all talk and no walk.

Biden logic is, to put it mildly, more like Biden madness.

In a country with millions of people out of work, he stopped construction of the Keystone XL pipeline from Canada — and put 11,000 high-paid construction workers out of work.

With a caravan of 10,000 Nicaraguan and Guatemalan migrants already on its way to the Texas border, he halted the building of the wall.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still raging in the United States, he's ready to greet thousands of illegal — and unvaccinated — immigrants at our border with open arms and hugs.

And out here in California, where 3 mil-

lion of the country's 12-plus million illegal immigrants already live, our streets are certain to be made more dangerous because of his decision not to deport illegal aliens — including criminal ones — for 100 days.

So thanks, President Joe. Way to put the good of the country above partisan politics.

In just two days you pleased both your leftist supporters who hate ICE and your party's environmental wacko wing.

It doesn't matter, I guess, that in the long run your new rules will shred our improved immigration system and endanger America's energy independence.

Or that they will hurt Canada's energy-based economy and help our competitors in the global oil and gas industry.

Good thinking, President Joe. You made 75 million Americans mad at you, but the liberal media are united.

They're loving every one of your executive decisions. CNN is so happy they can't stop slobbering over you and first lady Jill.

In fact, they praised "Doctor" Jill for bringing class back to the White House after an absence of four years.

It's fine to praise Jill Biden. But what did Melania Trump do to deserve that last-minute cheap shot?

She only speaks five languages, came to America with nothing and ended up living in the White House.

In a fair and decent world, that's the definition of the American Dream.

But for the past four years, the biased and nasty liberal media — from CNN to the editors of the *New York Times* and *Vogue* — were incapable of praising her even for her looks.

They hated on her or ignored her every day for one obvious reason: she married the wrong man.

For the next four years, with Biden or Kamala Harris in charge and the country divided 50-50, the media and their journalists are going to have a really tough time hiding their partisan biases and dishonesty.

When a COVID-20 virus comes over from China, or when the Biden administration throws the economy into a ditch, gets caught in bed with China or drags us into a war in Syria, who is the media going to blame?

With Donald Trump out of power and living in Florida, it's going to have to be the Russians.

Michael Reagan is the son of President Ronald Reagan, a political consultant, and the author of "Lessons My Father Taught Me: The Strength, Integrity and Faith of Ronald Reagan." He is the founder of the email service reagan.com and president of The Reagan Legacy Foundation.